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STEPHEN AND DAN HUGHES

OF COLD FIRE BREWING

PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA

COLD FIRE'S  
EURO FLAIR

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# TASTE OF THE EURO-NORTHWEST

*ColdFire Brewing brings European flair to Eugene's brewing community* BY AMY SCHNEIDER

PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA

**B**rothers Stephen and Dan Hughes want their brewery to honor community members who sacrifice a lot and don't get much recognition — namely, teachers and medical workers.

"Healthcare workers and teachers are probably two of the most unrecognized professions I can think of," says Dan Hughes, who opened ColdFire Brewing Company with his brother in January.

"There are a lot of unsung heroes out there, and we definitely wanted to recognize that those people are an important part of our community," Stephen Hughes adds.

That's why teachers and healthcare workers get a discount day each week at ColdFire.

ColdFire Brewing is the culmination of more than 15 years of home brewing, a backpacking trip around Europe and a community effort that started with two brothers. Located close to Skinner Butte Park right off the bike path, ColdFire has set up shop in an area of town that isn't yet saturated with breweries.

"We weren't really interested in being in the Whiteaker district, because the industry is well represented there, so we thought we'd try to be somewhere in an underserved section of the city," Dan Hughes says.

The brothers first thought of south Eugene, but then they caught wind of availability at 263 Mill Street and it seemed like a natural fit.

Three glistening brew tanks line the wall of ColdFire, and the brewers are about to buy a fourth. Starting next year, Dan and Stephen Hughes plan to expand into the neighboring building, which will give them more space for seating and additional brew tanks.

"It's been frustrating in a good way — what you might call a good problem to have — in that the beer styles we've been making sell so well that we just sell out," Dan Hughes says.

Take their German pilsner, for example, which takes six and a half weeks to brew. It sold out in two and a half weeks.

Still, there's plenty of beer to be had at ColdFire, and one of the compliments the brothers say they hear most is that customers appreciate the variety of offerings.

"One thing Dan and I have really focused on is doing traditional German and Belgian styles of beer with a Northwest flair," Stephen Hughes says. "I think the European styles are really what draw us."

ColdFire's beer menu (decorated beautifully in chalk artwork by artist Clover Ross) shows a diversity of beer types. The St. James India Red Ale, named after family friend Jim Weston, oatmeal stout and NW Ale form a foundation of flagships, while other offerings give a taste of the European-inspired brews that the brothers gravitate toward.

The Farmhouse Saison, for example, is divinely satisfying in its earthy, hearty flavor. ColdFire's Berliner Weisse beer tastes tart, sharp and refreshing.

"Lagers, farmhouse beers, good German ales — I think our experiences in Germany and Austria really impacted Dan and I as home brewers, so it's definitely something we wanted to highlight in our brewery," Stephen Hughes says.

The brothers started home brewing in 2000, but a 2011 backpacking trip to Europe — with stops in Germany, Hungary, Austria, Croatia, Montenegro and Turkey — had a lasting influence on their beer-making style.

"We ate well and we drank well," Dan Hughes remembers.

The Hughes brothers grew up in Cottage Grove, but they descend from Irish and German stock, and that heritage manifests not only in their beers but in their logo, as well. The logo has four meanings: It contains the Hughes family crest; it resembles an eagle, which represents Germany; it bears the shape of a hop; and embedded in the design is the Irish symbol for infinity.

The name ColdFire itself is a reference to fermentation — cooking food without heat.

"Fermentation is the most important aspect of brewing," Stephen Hughes says. "You can go wrong in a lot of ways, but if your fermentation is good, it makes the beer what it is."

As ColdFire Brewing expands its production space starting next year, the Hughes brothers say they want to prioritize their company values, including the fact that ColdFire is family-friendly, complete with a kids area and extra diapers and wipes in the bathroom.

And, of course, they'll be brewing more exciting new beers to try — Belgian beers, wild beers and sour beers, to name a few.

"More than anything, balance is really important in our beers," Stephen Hughes says. "Occasionally we'll do something that's big and crazy, but for the most part we want people to be able to try and enjoy a couple of different things. That's what I'm really aiming for in a lot of my recipe creations."

*ColdFire Brewing Company is located at 263 Mill Street in downtown Eugene and is open 4 to 10 pm Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 11 pm Fridays and Saturdays and noon to 10 pm Sundays. Learn more at coldfirebrewing.com.*

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# THE LABEL MAKERS

*Oakshire and Ninkasi celebrate 10 years in brewing with rejuvenated design* BY ALEX V. CIPOLE

In his office at Oakshire Brewing, Eric Keskeys flips through a weathered paperback revealing hundreds of ancient shapes and patterns. The room is dark, save for the glow from his dual computer screens, where working templates of beer labels have been put on pause.

He stops on a page to point out some trefoils in what he calls a design bible — the *Handbook of Designs and Devices: 1836 Basic Designs and Their Variations*, originally printed in 1946.

"We started with a couple options and discovered these exist in this book," says Keskeys, Oakshire's sole in-house graphic designer. He's talking about the logo Oakshire debuted earlier this year — a grey and white trefoil of a stylized oak — or what he describes as a modern interpretation of the brewery's original swirling oak logo.

"It served us really well as we were starting up," he says of the original. "We're moving into this new direction."

Oakshire is not the only local brewery moving in a new direction with branding; Ninkasi is in the thick of a design evolution as well. The timing is no coincidence: Both breweries were founded in 2006 and are marking their 10th anniversary year by rolling out more sophisticated aesthetics and more refined brand narratives on labels and packaging.

The shift is part of a larger trend in the beer industry. The golden age of craft brewing has ushered in a golden age of beer branding. As the craft beer movement grows, so does competition, and survival can mean a product catching the eye of a consumer when there are potentially hundreds of similar options on the shelf.

Oakshire and Ninkasi have a leg up in the fight for the customer's eye because of a rarity among breweries: in-house art and design.

## A NEW SHIRE

Keskeys says he and Jeff Althouse, Oakshire's founding brewer and owner, sat down last year at one of the picnic tables outside the brewery's public house to hash out a new direction.

"We were trying to figure out: What are our brand programs?" Keskeys recalls. "We were able to whittle everything down."

Althouse and Keskeys came up with three brand programs that Oakshire brews fall into: core (flagship beers and some seasonals), pilot (experimental) and vintage (aged or high ABV styles).

"All those programs work together," Keskeys says. "Those three shapes live inside the logo."

He also added a striped pattern to the lower portion of can and bottle labels to act as a sort of second, textless logo.

"These stripes on all these cans, when they're billboarded on a shelf, they're just going to read: This is our logo," Keskeys says.

The refined logos were just the beginning, however, as Keskeys also has been working on re-branding labels and packaging of each individual beer, from the stalwarts like the Watershed IPA and Amber Ale to the highly seasonal sour Sun Made Cucumber Berliner Weisse to brand-new brews that have yet to hit the shelves, such as a Baltic porter.

"Outdoor recreation is a big part of our identity," Keskeys explains, but "let's maybe make it so it's not the typical crest with mountains and streams" in the design.

While the Watershed IPA label does feature a mountain and a stream (it is the watershed, after all), the labels for Overcast Espresso Stout, Reclamation Lager and others are like short stories. The lager, for one, features a handsaw and a wood-grain crest.

The new look is sharp, bright and iconic with a tinge of retro — a departure from the neutral-toned uniform labels of yore. The designer says his inspiration is rooted in the late '70s, when President Jimmy Carter signed a law legalizing homebrewing of beer with higher than 0.5 percent alcohol content, and a "weird little renaissance" in craft brewing took off.

"I kind of asked myself the question: If I was working in a props department and making beer for a movie in like '78," Keskeys says, "how would I make that beer look?"

The new design templates paired with Oakshire's new labeling process allows for unprecedented flexibility in everything from a beer's seasonal identity to the size of the batch and the timing of its release. Oakshire recently discovered that its bottle labeler also works for cans.

"We can decide on a beer two months ahead of time," Keskeys says, pointing out that most new beers have typically had to be planned a year in advance. "We can wrap them



OPPOSITE: OAKSHIRE DESIGNER ERIC KESKEYS WITH NEW DESIGNS

LEFT: PROCESS IMAGES FROM OAKSHIRE'S CAN REDESIGN

ABOVE: FROM SKETCH TO LABEL OF NINKASI'S NEW HELLES BELLES DESIGN

and move really light and quick."

Regardless of increased efficiency and flexibility, Keskeys is a one-man art department and says he looks forward to 2017, when the majority of new branding will be in place.

"Next year is going to be a lot easier," he says with a laugh.

## THE NINKASI NARRATIVE

In its art department, Ninkasi now employs creative director Nicholas Yarger, graphic designer Wade Long and artist-in-residence Neal Williams. This is unheard of for a brewery that's below, say, Sierra Nevada's prominence.

"It's always been one of our strengths to have an in-house art department," says Jamie Floyd, Ninkasi co-founder and founding brewer. "Most breweries shop this stuff out. For us, it means we get to tell our story in the most genuine way we can."

"It's increasingly hard to come up with creative names [for beers] with so many breweries coming up with so many ideas," he continues. "People need to look for a more creative way to get a voice out."

More than getting the voice out, the well-oiled art and branding machine that is Yarger, Long and Williams must dial in the soul of Ninkasi, as they put it. Long says this is possible because the art team is part of the company, interacting with senior management and brewers on a regular basis.

"Where people fall short is where they have to go out for their art and you're getting an interpretation from a third party," Long says. "They're not entrenched in the culture of the company."

"We're putting personality, we're putting soul into our labels," Yarger adds. "I think that's what really separates us from what a lot of other brands are doing right now."

Long has been at Ninkasi for four years, while Yarger and Williams both began in the brewery's art department in June 2015. When Yarger came on as creative director, he says

his goal was to rebrand Ninkasi's entire lineup, taking the original branding from former Ninkasi creative director Tony Figoli and pushing it a step further.

Standing in Ninkasi's bright industrial art department in the administration building in the Whiteaker, Yarger points to a corkboard stretching across one wall. Pinned to it are dozens of marketing materials, including some of the original designs for Oatis Oatmeal Stout, Spring Reign American Pale Ale and Maiden the Shade.

"The art director before me did a good job of branding all of our flagships," Yarger says. "It had a very distinct look. I've kind of just adopted that and just added to it — added more personality, added a little more texture."

Looking at the redesigns on the corkboard, it's clear Ninkasi has embraced a more narrative, detailed approach, which has been influenced by Williams, a gig poster illustrator by trade. Now, The Total Domination IPA label features sunny snowcapped peaks, Dawn of the Red IPA has a detailed sign of the horns against a field of red zombies and Tricerahops Double IPA features a teal triceratops.

The design du jour, however, is for Ninkasi's limited run of the commemorative 22-ounce N10 Imperial Blended Ale to celebrate the brewery's 10th anniversary, to be released in July. For this project, the art team did decide to collaborate with an outside artist, the Portland-based designer Blaine Fontana.

"We love to support the art industry too, and working with another artist always brings new stuff to our work," Long says.

The packaging is a trip. The box is wrapped in a holographic foil, as is the bottle label. The colors are bold oranges, yellows and reds marked by teal icons of beer barrels, the brewery, foam "No. 1" fingers and more. Long says he had been unsure if senior management would support the costly holographic foil, but they embraced it immediately.

"To have that trust from them to be creative and really let us do what we're good at is something really special," Yarger says. "Doing [design] for 20 years, it's very rare that you have a senior management team who's like 'Yeah, you guys, we trust you. Kill it.'"



ABOVE: DOUG AND BRIAN COOMBS WITH MATT VAN WYK

PHOTOS BY TRASK BEDORTHA



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# ALL ABOUT THAT BARREL

A lesson in barrel-aged beers from the  
new Alesong Brewing & Blending

BY WILLIAM KENNEDY

One of Eugene's newest breweries features some familiar faces: Matt Van Wyk and Brian Coombs, formerly of acclaimed local brewery Oakshire. In 2015, Van Wyk and Coombs, along with Coomb's brother Doug, struck out on their own, launching Alesong Brewing & Blending, a company with a unique emphasis on barrel-aged beer.

Van Wyk tells EW that Alesong, located in west Eugene, is an artisan brewery "that's going to mainly focus on barrel-aged beer and Belgian-inspired beers."

About 80 percent of Alesong brews will be aged in an oak barrel, whether it be wine barrels, whiskey barrels or even gin barrels.

"We're focusing our whole company on oak-aged beers," Van Wyk continues. "This is our thing. We're going to be small, but our process is focused on aging in wood."

Van Wyk explains that when aging beer in barrels, the barrels become a characteristic of the brew.

"If you have a bourbon barrel, it's going to pick up some of that bourbon-y, vanilla, toasted coconut flavors," he says. "It can also pick up the wood itself — tannins — just like wine. It provides another layer of complex flavors. You're getting flavors of what might've been in the barrel."

Van Wyk contends barrel-aged beers sometimes appeal to people who might not normally like beer. "Just have an open mind," he urges. "There are a lot of different flavors of barrel-aged beers; some are sour, some are booze-y like bourbon. You can put IPAs in barrels. Don't knock it 'til you've tried it."

Barrel-aged beers are similar to wine in many ways. "You get the acidity," Van Wyk says. "You get the fruit flavors and you get the oak flavor and suddenly you're getting something that's a little more akin to a wine than a beer."

And just like wine, it takes time for the beers to age to fruition. So it will be awhile before many Alesong beers are on the market. In the meantime, Alesong has a few beers on draft at a variety of local bottle shops, tap houses and restaurants like Bier Stein, Board and The Tap & Growler, all part of what Van Wyk calls a "soft opening."

Given the longer process and strong flavors, barrel-aged beers often have a higher price point, leading many to look at them as a treat for special occasions only, but Van Wyk says Alesong's beers will be more of an everyday drinking experience.

"Some myths built up about barrel-aged beer: It's special; wait for a holiday or a special anniversary to have it, like you would a bottle of champagne," he says. "People need to realize that it's very approachable."

Alesong, which currently does not have a retail space or an established tasting room, will have its first bottle release Aug. 20.

"That'll be a chance to come to the brewery, purchase and drink some of the bottles," he says.

Van Wyk and his partners have big hopes for their brewery: building a brewery and tasting room near King Estate Winery, southwest of Eugene.

For more information about Alesong, and the Aug. 20 release event, go to [alesongbrewing.com](http://alesongbrewing.com). The brewery is located at 1000 Conger, Unit C in Eugene.



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# BEER BEAT

Brews, news and events from around Eugene, the Willamette Valley and beyond

BY AMY SCHNEIDER AND ALEX V. CIPOLLE

The **Falling Sky Pizzeria & Public House** officially opened its doors June 20 at the newly renovated Erb Memorial Union on the University of Oregon campus. Falling Sky's newest location sells "falling pies," which includes The Firebird, with roasted chicken, pickled peppers, fried garlic, mozzarella, spicy marinara and hot sauce. Subs, soups, salads and pasta are also on the menu, along with Falling Sky's tasty brews. Among the current beers on tap: Daywalker Irish Red, Hard Rain American Stout and Make American Wheat Again. Head over to [fallingskybrewing.com](http://fallingskybrewing.com) for the full menu.

Senator Jeff Merkley's office announced June 16 that legislation has been adopted, and \$5 million devoted, "to help reduce delays in the labeling process for beer and wine. The surge in small brewers and wine makers in the last few years has caused long delays for small businesses who must apply for labeling through the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau."

Ninkasi nabbed an exclusive partnership with **TrackTown USA** for the 2016 U.S. Olympic Team Trials July 1-10. Earlier this year the brewery introduced its **Beer Run IPA**, which will be on tap at the trials. In May, Ninkasi and the **Eugene Emeralds** baseball team also announced a partnership for the 2016 season with Ninkasi's regular brew lineup, as well the Beer Batter Session Ale, on tap at PK Park.

Ninkasi is celebrating its **10th anniversary** with a public party featuring food carts and live music noon to 9 pm Sunday, Aug. 14, at the Ninkasi Tasting Room, 272 Van Buren Street.

Downward dog and glasses up: **The Beer Yogis Summer Road Trip** cruises into Eugene July 23 at **Hop Valley Brewing**. Yoga teachers Melissa Klimo-Major and Mikki Trowbridge are taking a month-long nationwide trip to promote the benefits of yoga in craft breweries. See [thebeeryogis.com](http://thebeeryogis.com) for more info.

Oregon Wild's **Oregon Brewshed Alliance** is going strong, with even more breweries on board, including Hop Valley, Oakshire, Ninkasi, Falling Sky, McMenamins and Claim 52. The alliance is committed to "protecting water at its source," since clean water is the foundation of good beer. Baerlic Brewing Co., a Portland member of the alliance, recently released River Baer, a rye summer lager intended to raise awareness of the importance of protecting watersheds. See more at [oregonbrewshedalliance.org](http://oregonbrewshedalliance.org).

Party down, west Eugene. Eugene's Westside Wine, Beer and Spirits district hosts the **3rd Annual Westside Warehouse District Block Party** 2 to 10 pm Saturday, July 16, at the 500 Block of Commercial Street; FREE. Look for libations from Noble Estate Winery, J. Scott Cellars, Claim 52 Brewing, Viking Braggot Company, Crescendo Organic Spirits and Alesong Brewing & Blending, plus loads of food trucks and live music.

Gotta catch 'em all: Earlier this spring, the 2-year-old **Eugene Ale Trail** debuted a larger beer passport and added more breweries, cideries, bottle shops, tap houses and distilleries. Visit [eugenealetrail.com](http://eugenealetrail.com) for info.

On July 30, Corvallis hosts a brew-filled bash with the **Craft Beer Picnic** at Cornelius Farm, 3375 S.W. 53rd Street. Lawn games and other festivities will accompany some of the Willamette Valley's best brewers, including Block 15 Brewing, 2 Towns Ciderhouse, Flat Tail Brewing, Mazama Brewing, Nectar Creek Mead and more; \$20. See [corvalliscraftbeer.com](http://corvalliscraftbeer.com). Next up in Corvallis is the 9th annual **Septembeerfest** at 1 to 9 pm Saturday, Sept. 10, Avery Park, featuring more than 77 beers, ciders and meads.

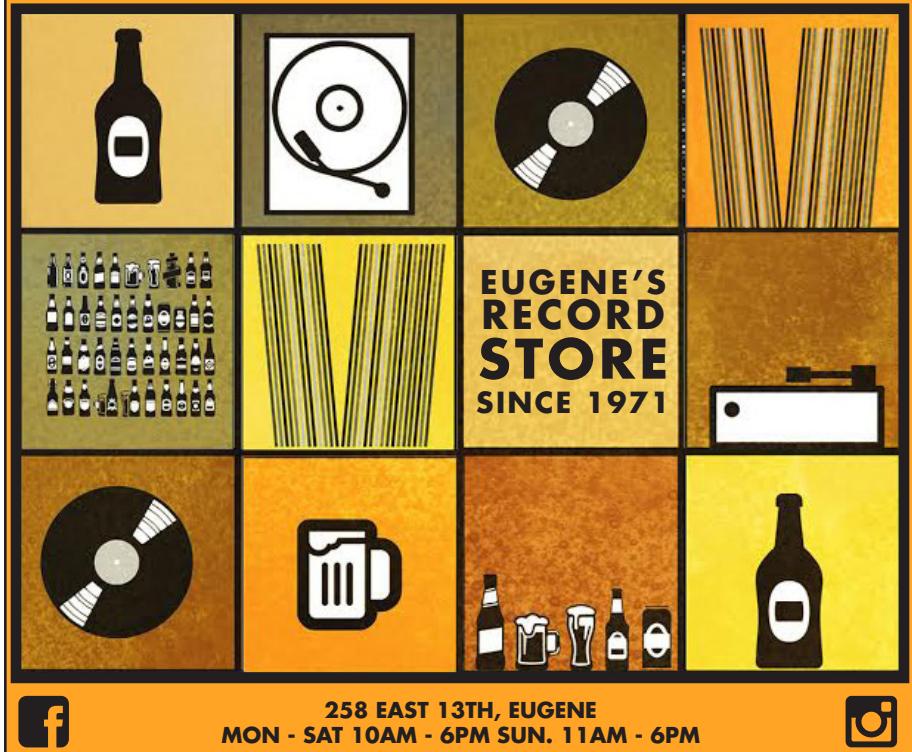
Oakridge hosts its ever-popular **Keg & Cask Festival** Aug. 13 at Brewers Union Local 180. Proceeds from the event benefit the Oakridge community. Last year, attendees got to swill Alpine Trail Ale by Plank Town Brewing and Fenrir Stout with Orange Blossom Honey by Viking Braggot Company; \$15 buys a logo glass and four tastings. Check it out on Facebook.

The Coburg-based farmhouse brewery **Agrarian Ales** releases **Pisgah Heritage Brew** July 24 with Friends of Buford Park; the beer is made with wild transplanted hops from Mount Pisgah. The brewery also hosts its annual **hops-picking party** Aug. 26-28 with live music and tours; open to the public. Check out [agales.com](http://agales.com) for more.

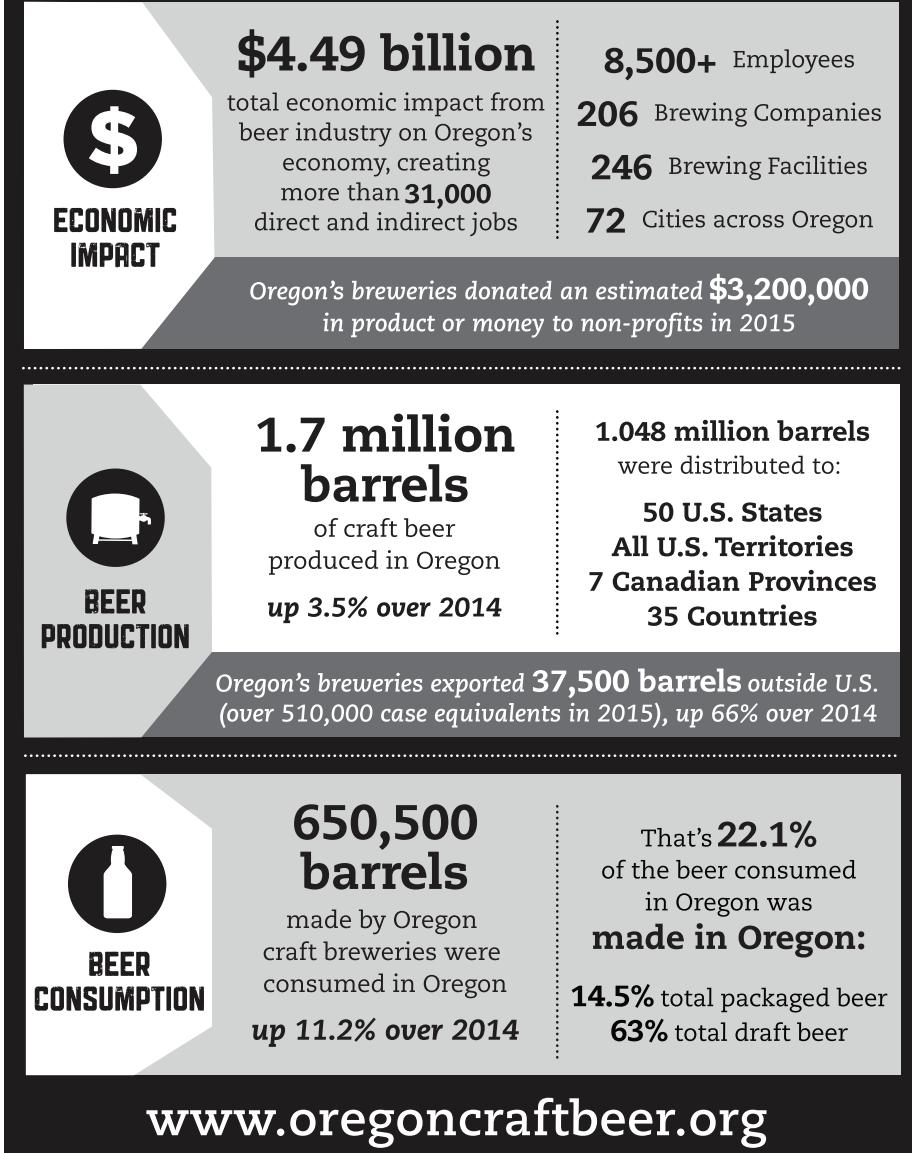
On June 25, the Eugene chapter of **Beers Made By Walking** hosted its last guided hike of the season at Green Island with brewers from Agrarian Ales, Falling Sky, Ninkasi and Oakshire. The program will tap the fruits of its labor Nov. 8 at The Bier Stein; proceeds to benefit the McKenzie River Trust.

Barrel-aging is the new black: The **inaugural Eugene Little Woody Barrel-Aged Beer and Whiskey Festival** will rejoice in wood-aged beers, as well as limited-run whiskeys and bourbons and ciders, Oct. 21-22 at Venue 252, 252 Lawrence Street. The festival began in Bend nine years ago, where it will celebrate its own fest Sept. 2-3. Look to taste special batches that will never appear on a store shelf from Deschutes Brewery, Ninkasi, GoodLife Brewing, 10 Barrel Brewing, New Belgium Brewing and more. Go to [littlewoodyeugene.com](http://littlewoodyeugene.com) for tickets and info; \$12-\$35, \$5 entry for designated drivers.

## HOUSE OF RECORDS



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